

CHURCH. NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

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Debate on Relations With the Eastern Churches.

The events of the last few months, not the least developments in Hungary, have, quite naturally, also in the Northern countries given rise to a debate on the relations with the Eastern Churches.

In a leading article in the Northern ecumenical magazine "Kristen Gemenskap" (Christian Unity), called "The Cause of Hungary Is Also Ours", the editor, Dean Nils Karlström, Skara, Sweden, writes about the connection between the Western Churches and the Churches behind the "iron curtain":

"It is a matter of the utmost importance that the Eastern European Churches do not become isolated, but that they are made to feel that they belong to a universal Christian fellowship. Through contact with the Western Churches they may also be informed about the true state of affairs in the states outside their own country which is either occupied or directed by the Soviet Union, conditions about which they are often only sketchely or wrongly informed. Also from this point of view it is important that the Churches of the free world through their contact with the Churches behind the "iron curtain" plainly and clearly state what they think of the policy of the Soviet Union and its satellites.

"The events in Hungary have made it very difficult, however, to keep up this religious contact between East and West. It is very doubtful indeed whether any contact at all between the West and the Eastern Churches will be allowed in the future. But quite apart from this, it is a great question whether at least the official Church delegation visits to the Eastern Churches should not be discontinued completely for the time being. Otherwise there is the risk that such delegations will be regarded by the authorities and the Soviet Russian propaganda as evidence that Western Church circles have accepted the conditions created by the Soviet Russian policy. The risk of such an interpretation has also existed previously, but to-day it is more than ever of vital importance to prevent it, in view of what has happened and still is happening, especially in Hungary.

"At the moment attempts should probably be made at finding other ways of asserting the fellowship with confessing Christian sections in the Eastern European Churches and of emphasizing the common front against the totalitarian regimes.

"In taking action and adopting measures in the present situation it must be our aim to support Hungary in every possible way in its desperate struggle. Hungary is fighting for the cause of freedom and human rights. Therefore the cause of Hungary is also ours."

The Danish newspaper "Kristeligt Dagblad" in a leading article, occasioned by the Australian Church delegation's visit to China and its report on the conditions of the Church in China, writes among other things:

"In spite of everything, November 4th and all the subsequent horrors and relapses into the most ghastly Stalinism could not, and must not, completely sever the Christian ties between East and West. It has all become even more complicated. This is shown by, for instance, the almost shocking open letter from Professor Hromadka to friends in the West concerning events in Hungary. But even this cannot, and dare not, mean that all connections with him must be broken off. That was not the meaning, either, with the answer sent to him from Danish Church quarters (see CN No. 24). Some of the Church dignitaries in these "Eastern" countries must probably be ignored, as far as possible. And such almost "social" arrangements as a highly official visit by Russian bishops had better be postponed, even for a very long time. But the connection with our closest fellow-Christians in the various congregations must be kept up, enlarged, and utilized to the utmost. Both for their sakes and our own, yea, for the sake of all humanity. Christians should not as a rule be simple-minded. But now and then they must venture so far that they may seem to be so to an excited and suspicious world."

Finnish Dean Elected President of the Northern Council.

At the meeting in Helsinki (Helsingfors) last month of the Northern Council which is the political co-ordinating organ of the Northern countries, the prominent Finnish member of Parliament, Dean Lennart Heljas of the Agrarian Party, was elected President. At the beginning of the 1920'ies Dean Heljas was a minister to seamen in England and since then he has been rector of the Finnish town of Kuopio. After having been a member of the municipal corporation for six years he was returned to Parliament in 1939 and has been a member since. During the first years after the War he was Minister of Social Affairs and was thus responsible for the tremendous social activities made necessary by the evacuation of the population of Karelen and by the many War widows. For some time he was Minister of Church Affairs, and at the recent U.N. meeting he was a member of the first Finnish U.N. delegation.

The Financial Committee of the Northern Council at the meeting in Helsinki (Helsingfors) proposed, among other things, that seamen's homes, open to seamen from the Northern countries in common, should be established in countries not belonging to the Northern

group, one of the reasons for this being that many ships have mixed Scandinavian crews and it would thus be expedient if they could go to the same seamen's home in foreign ports. An extensive co-operation between the Missions to Seamen of the various Northern countries is already far advanced, and in several places there are homes which take in seamen from all the Northern countries. Recently a joint Northern hymn-book for seamen was also published.

DENMARK

First Church Service for Emigrants Held in Århus.

During these years quite a number of Danes emigrate to overseas countries, especially to Canada and Australia. In the new country the organization "Dansk Kirke i Udlandet" (Danish Church in Foreign Countries) tries to get into contact with the emigrants, and several Danish church ministers and secretaries do a great piece of work in other parts of the world to assist the emigrants in various ways. But only last month the Danish Lutheran National Church took up the task of arranging special farewell services for the emigrants and their families. The first service of this kind took place in the Cathedral of Århus in connection with the departure of 210 Danes to Canada, and no less than 1300 emigrants and their relations attended the service which became an unforgettable experience. The Bishop of Århus, Bishop Skat Hoffmeyer, served before the altar and the President of "Dansk Kirke i Udlandet", the Rev. Svend Nielsen, preached. He spoke about the importance to people going out to strange surroundings of having God with them, of having learnt to fold their hands and seek their refuge in Him, whom many of them may not have found while they were still in their own country.

It is the plan to arrange such special services for emigrants and their relations in the future immediately before the departure of larger contingents of emigrants.

Church From Time of Reformation Becomes Christian Social Work Centre.

Part of the old St. Nicolai's Church in Copenhagen, where the Danish reformer Hans Tausen, at one time preached his message to the population of the Capital, will be converted into a Christian social work centre. The church, which is situated in the centre of the city where the population has been on a steady decrease, has not been used as a parish church for a number of years. Only occasionally has the church been employed for services and otherwise the building has accommodated a large municipal library.

Now the social relief organization of the Lutheran National Church "Kirkens Korshær" (Church Army), will have its headquarters in the old church, and besides offices there will be rooms for the various kinds of work of the Institution in the city, a dress-maker's sewing room for housewives of limited means, etc. A new venture will be an advisory centre to be open every day from nine o'clock in the morning to three o'clock at night. Here anyone should be able to find assistance and advice in personal and spiritual matters, and a large number of clergymen and laymen in Copenhagen will be ready to serve as pa-

stors and advisers in co-operation with experts on legal, physical, psychiatric, and pedagogical matters. It is the plan to supplement this personal advisory service with a special telephone and correspondence service if the need for such a service should be found to exist.

"Youth For Christ" World Congress in Copenhagen.

The inter-denominational movement "Youth for Christ" will conduct its world congress in Copenhagen from August 4th - 11th. Some 1500 participants from all parts of the world are expected and most of these will probably be teen-agers.

According to "Kristeligt Dagblad" in Copenhagen the congress will include a number of instruction meetings for the young people and in the evenings there will be big meetings in various large halls in the city.

FINLAND

Lively Activity at the Ecumenical Institute.

The Ecumenical Institute at the University of Helsinki (Helsingfors), established in 1955, is now actively at work. Head of the Institute is Professor Osmo Tiilikä with a graduate of divinity, Seppo Teinonen, as first assistant.

An agreement has been reached with the Missionary Research Library in New York so that the Institute may borrow literature and micro-films from this library for the use of its scholars.

The Institute tries to take up some of the new problems put before theological research by the Ecumenical Movement. Besides this, the Institute arranges for courses on ecumenical, religious, and foreign mission subjects also for other students than those at the Institute.

No Particular Shortage of Clergymen in Finland.

An investigation conducted by the academical central organization in Finland, "Akava", has ascertained a slight, but not alarming shortage of clergymen in relation to the number of vacant livings, and this will probably be the case for the next 5 - 6 years. This fact refers to men, while women graduates of divinity have difficulty in finding employment in the Church. Some of them have taken up education as teachers in schools.

Rector of the University on the Importance of Christianity.

At the opening function in the assembly hall of the University of Helsinki (Helsingfors) of the College Week last month, arranged by the Christian Student Organizations (see CN No. 25), the Rector of the University, Professor Edvin Linkomies, said among other things:

"It is part of the special nature of Western culture that it is founded on Christianity. A person growing up in this cultural atmosphere cannot possibly be satisfied with things belonging within the

limits of this world only. He must consider the question whether there is not something in man which does not perish together with the life, but is preserved in eternity. Christianity has given to human beings of the West the conception of someone who with wonderful precision keeps the universe rotating, and it wants to show who is behind all the great wonders of nature.....

"The main object of the teaching at a university is to enlarge the field of thought of the students, but besides this it should also strive at giving them an earnest outlook on life which may mean an ideal support in their future work."

The same evening the President of the Student Association, Professor Pentti Kaitera, also gave an address. He emphasized that just as it once was university circles which led the way in the flight away from the Church, in the same way it ought now to be the responsibility of the university students to lead people back to it.

The President of the Finnish Republic, Urho Kekkonen, was present at the opening function at which the Archbishop Ilmari Salomies and the Rector of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Finland, Johannes Suhola, also spoke.

In connection with the College Week a performance was given of the much discussed play by the leader of the Swedish Sigtuna Foundation, Olov Hartman, called "Prophet and Carpenter".

Lectures on Theology on Åland.

It is seldom that a whole group of professors of divinity leave the home town of their faculty in order to give scientific lectures to quite ordinary parish members elsewhere. This happened, however, last month when the Divinity Faculty of the Åbo Academy had arranged for three days of theological lectures at Mariehamn on Åland. The main theme was "The Gospel and Modern Man".

The Dean of the Faculty, Professor W.A. Schmidt, expert on Church History, dealt with the subjects "The Church in the Old Society" and "The Church in the New Society", Professor of Systematic Theology, Valter Lindström, lectured on "Where is the Connection Between the Message of the Gospel and Secularized Man?" and the Professor of Practical Theology, Helge Nyman, spoke on "Aims and Means of Preaching" and "The Catechetical Function of the Church". The exegetical scholars also lectured on subjects related to the main theme. Thus Professor Rafael Gyllenberg gave two Bible study classes on the Epistle to the Hebrews in which the audience was introduced to the dominant problems of modern Bible research, and Professor H. Ringgren told about the important discoveries of the Dead Sea scrolls.

Investigation on the Relationship Between State and Church.

Two Social Democratic Members of the Finnish Parliament, Varma Kosto Turunen and Gunnar Henriksson, have proposed that the Government should make a comprehensive investigation into the consequences of a possible change in or abolition of the present relationship between the Lutheran National Church in Finland and the State.

The proposal undoubtedly originates in the fact that a similar investigation has been decided upon by the Swedish Parliament (see CN No. 22). It is most likely that it will also be carried through in Finland,

but it is doubtful whether it will lead to any major changes in the present relationship between Church and State.

ICELAND

The Church at Saurbær, at which Iceland's great composer of hymns Hallgrímur Pétursson, was a rector, has been so badly damaged during a terrific storm just before Christmas that it may no longer be used for services. A new church in its place is already under construction and may soon be dedicated.

On the occasion of the 900 years' jubilee of the Diocese of Skálholt last summer it is planned to publish a liberally illustrated book on Skálholt and the Jubilee celebrations on July 1st, 1956.

NORWAY

17 Evangelization Campaigns to Be Carried Out This Year.

The National Secretary, Olav Egeland, tells that in no less than 17 different places it is planned to conduct campaigns of evangelization during 1957. Among the places where such campaigns are being planned are Berger and environs, Trondheim and environs, Ålesund, and the deaneries of Hedemarken and Kinnland. In no other country where similar drives have been carried out have they met with such a response as in Norway, the Secretary states. It seems as if the time is ripe for this method of activity while it would probably not have been possible even just a few years ago.

The evangelization drives in Norway are launched only after a period of intensive preparation including prayers, Bible classes, the training of visitors, and house to house visits with invitations. When the campaign proper, with meetings and church services, is over it is followed up by an organized service of assistance.

In many places the drives have resulted in spiritual renewal, increased attendance in church, and an increasing number of communicants. In Høyland an extensive revival has taken place. Ever since the congregational campaign last year the church has been filled to capacity week after week for meetings and services, and every Saturday a thousand young people gather for the special young people's meeting in the church. A great number of people in all walks of life have here come to a personal Christian belief.

Counter-Proposal by Church Quarters Concerning Induced Abortion.

On the initiative of the Norwegian "Kirkeligt Landslag" four Members of Parliament, belonging to the Christian People's Party, the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Agrarian Party, have introduced a complete alternative proposal to the Bill on Legally Induced Abortion introduced by the Parliamentary Penal Code Commission (see CN No. 22). The proposal has been drawn up by a Member of Parliament, a physician, and a lawyer in co-operation. It differs from the former Bill primarily by not permitting legally induced abortion for social reasons, while the Penal Code Commission wanted to make in-

duced abortion legal in cases where "serious and prolonged illness of husband or wife or child, alcoholism, or insanity, housing shortage, or other particularly unfortunate conditions might turn the birth of a child into disaster." The new proposal only allows for induced abortion on medical or eugenical grounds or when pregnancy is the result of a criminal action. The operation must always be done at a public hospital, and it is proposed to establish boards of control and appeal.

The proposal of the "Kirkeligt Landslag" has been sent to a number of Christian organizations and Church authorities for recommendation and it will undoubtedly find wide support, not the least on account of the strong opposition to the Bill introduced by the Commission, among others, a number of prominent senior physicians who are against induced abortion on social grounds.

Magnificent Programme for Easter Week Celebrations in Oslo.

A working committee, headed by the Dean Torv Gohel and consisting of representatives of various Church circles in Oslo, are about to wind up the final preparations for the Easter Week Festival in the Norwegian Capital.

The reason for this arrangement is the fact that Easter week becomes rather tedious to those who are left behind when thousands of the inhabitants of Oslo leave the city in order to spend their holiday in the hills, and in recognition of the festive character, taken in the best sense of the word, which ought to distinguish Easter the Festival has been arranged.

In the Church of Frogner a sacred play, dealing with Easter, will be performed, on Easter Sunday a sacred concert will be given, and on Easter morning there will be an open air service in Frogner Park. There will be sight-seeing tours in some of the churches in the city, liturgical devotions in connection with visits to the National Museum, and a big youth rally on Easter Monday. Endeavours are also made to persuade owners of the churches to arrange their programmes with special attention to the Easter celebrations, and finally, the ordinary church services in the city are naturally included in the arrangements.

In this way it is hoped to bring the modern city dweller into close contact with the old message of Easter.

Extensive Church Building Programme in Oslo.

Because of restrictions church building activities have been somewhat limited ever since the War. But now it looks as if things may be speeded up in the next few years. On April 28th Bishop Skemo will lay the corner stone for the Torshov Church, the first church to be erected in Oslo since the War, and after that work will be begun on two new churches in the suburbs of Oslo. The "Small Churches Foundation" in the city hopes to obtain the erection of Hagle Church in the outskirts of Oslo in the course of this year, and by simplification of the building technique it is hoped to put up the church, with 600 seats, and connecting congregational hall at a cost of one million Norwegian crowns, which amounts to almost half of the usual cost of

a church of this size. Finally, the building of a chapel in the woods for sports people, the Østermarks Chapel, will be completed this summer. The Chapel will seat 250.

No less than 4 parishes in Oslo are at work, or about to begin work, on congregational halls, and in 6 places the congregations are planning to build homes for old people. On April 1st the big home for homeless and discharged persons, erected by the Home Mission in Oslo, will be opened. This building, including also business premises for letting out, will cost altogether 4,8 mill. crowns.

Several of the Free Church communities also have great plans for building. The Baptist Community is about to complete the erection of its theological seminary and school for young people at Bærum, outside Oslo. The Methodists are going to build a big church in the centre of Oslo, and the Salvation Army a social centre for houseless people.

Church Academy Arranges Contact Conferences.

The Norwegian Church Academy, Fredriksborg, officially established last autumn (see CN No. 21), has planned for two contact conferences during the spring and summer. In the first place, representatives of the press in the Capital are invited to meet people from the Church who have access to "good stuff" in order to let them discuss common problems and tasks, and in June a conference will be arranged for authors where Christian and non-Christian points of view may be interchanged.

The Church Academy also conducts two monthly meetings at which highly topical problems in the religious and cultural spheres are taken up for debate. On the first evening an interesting and lively discussion on the cultural programme of the Labour Party (see CN No. 23) took place between representatives of the Social Democratic Party and the Church, and among other subjects may be noted "The Social Revolution of the East, a Challenge to the Peoples of the West" and "The Problem of Guilt in the Norwegian Literature Last Autumn."

Proposal for Shorter Theological Training for Middleaged Men.

In a leading article the Norwegian weekly "Vår Kirke" published by the Home Mission in Oslo, suggests that a brief theological training for middleaged men who wish to take up pastoral work should be introduced on the pattern of a similar arrangement in the Anglican Church. The paper feels that a general education, coupled with experience of life, may equal part of the theological studies and that such clergymen may constitute a fresh impulse in the congregations and, not the least, in the ecclesiastic profession.

The reason for this proposal is the fact that there will probably be a certain shortage of clergymen in Norway in the years to come, and that the paper has previously strongly advocated the establishment of more livings so that the big parishes might be divided. In this connection the paper referred to the fact that the number of clergymen in Norway in no way has kept in step with the great increase in population and that the ecclesiastical work becomes quite overwhelming in the big parishes so that in many places a division of the parish would be advisable.

Stewardship Service at Trondheim for Six Years.

For more than 6 years now the congregation of the Cathedral of Trondheim has had an active Stewardship Service through which laymen have contributed considerably to the life of the congregation. Some have invited groups for Bible study classes in their homes, others have collected money for social work in the congregation and similar purposes, a number have found it their special duty to visit old and lonely people, and still others conduct meetings for parents of Sunday school students and all active workers in the congregation. Members of the Stewardship Service meet regularly for discussions and planning and prayers.

The aim of the Stewardship Service is expressed in the "rule" adopted at the founding of the Service. It says there:

"As members of the Stewardship Service we will, individually and in unison, strive at furthering everything which may be of help to the edification of the congregation, and the growth of Christian faith and charity in the individual members of the congregation. We will try to gather members of the congregation, children as well as grown-ups, around the word of God and the sacraments, for services in church, at meetings in homes and parish halls, and in any other way which God may show us.

"We will especially have those in mind who for some reason or other are badly hurt or in a difficult situation, the old, the sick, the lonely, and be of help to them as Christian friends and fellow-workers.

"We will assist the regular staff of the congregation, its clergymen, sexton, and deaconesses, and, as far as possible, act as a link between them and the individual members of the congregation and their homes".

SWEDEN

Only 18% Want Separation of Church and State.

"Morgonbladet" has published the result of an interesting investigation, carried out by the "Svenska Institutet för Opinionsforskning" (Swedish Institute for Research on Public Opinion), revealing that only a small minority of 18% wish to sever the traditional ties between the Lutheran National Church and the State. 51% are in favour of the present arrangement, and 31% have no clear opinion. It is noteworthy that app. 30% of regular church-goers in the Lutheran National Church and an equal percentage of regular church-goers in the Free Churches wish the Church to be separated from the State. Among the men interrogated 24% are in favour of separating Church and State while the corresponding number among the women is 13%. When dividing people according to political views the investigation shows that 60% of the Communists asked, 24% of the Liberal People's Party (many of whom belong to the Free Churches), and only 11% of the Agrarian Party want a separation of Church and State.

More than half of the people against a separation of Church and State motivate their standpoint with "It is alright as it is", while one third refer to various more or less idealistic reasons. Most of

those wanting a separation give as the reason for their wish that it would be of real advantage to the Church, while one fourth said that in that case the Church tax could be abolished.

56% of the people questioned were in favour of deciding the future relationship between Church and State by a plebiscite, 21% were against it, and 23% were indifferent.

European Methodist Conference in Stockholm.

The first European Methodist conference since the War will take place in Stockholm from July 29th to August 2nd with some 50 delegates from 20 countries and a number of guests and people interested from all over the world. The last European conference was held in Copenhagen in 1939, but it is the plan in the future to conduct regular conferences for the Methodists in Europe.

Half of the subjects at the conference will deal with ecumenical matters, and it is hoped that the conference at Stockholm will result also in a closer co-operation between the British and the American branches of Methodism. The principal difference between the two groups to-day is that the British group does not recognize the Bishop's Ministry, it is stated by the Northern Bishop Odd Hagen, who takes it as a sign of closer contact, however, that he himself, for the first time, has been invited to an English Methodist conference.

There are 250.000 Methodists in Europe outside Britain, 2,6 million in Britain.

Good Results of Advertising Campaign for Church Attendance.

A just completed investigation seems to show that the advertising campaign for church attendance in Stockholm from October 5th to November 4th last year (see CN No. 21) has given good results.

In 11 of the 98 churches in Stockholm attendance had been greatly increased, in 52 there had been "some increase", and in only 13 the report was "no increase". Unfortunately it was possible only in a few cases to get accurate figures for comparison as the number of people in church are not generally counted. But in the 6 places where it was possible to compare the figures from the same Sundays last year with those of this year, it turned out that there was an increase of 20%, in 3 other churches where the total number of church-goers (evening services included) could be ascertained, there was an increase of 37%.

Whether the increase was due to the advertising campaign or there would have been an increase in any case for other reasons is, of course, uncertain. But there seems to be good cause for believing that the campaign has been of effect as 5% of the people asked by the "Svenska Institutet för Opinionsforskning" (Swedish Institute for Research on Public Opinion) answered that they went to church during the campaign because of the advertisements in the press. This percentage equals 52.000 of the inhabitants of Stockholm.

It turns out, moreover, that more than half of the population of Stockholm had read the advertisements, and that just as many thought that it was quite natural for the Church to advertise in this way.

Five Members of Parliament Speak at Revivalist Meeting.

The great revivalist campaign in Stockholm conducted by the Lutheran National Church together with a number of Free Churches was prolonged by a fortnight so that it finished at the beginning of March only.

One of the main events was a meeting at which 5 Members of Parliament, belonging to the four big parties, stood side by side on the platform in the Blasieholm's Church and quietly, but earnestly gave witness to the importance of a personal belief in Christianity as being the greatest force and value in life. They were Sam Norup, Agrarian Party; James Dickson, the Conservatives; Evert Svensson, the Social Democrats; and Johan Ahlsten and Axel Gustafsson, both from the Liberal Party.

Also in other ways attention was drawn to the revivalist drive. From several sides, mostly from radical-cultural quarters, the way in which the campaign was conducted was strongly criticized. One found it "vulgar", another called the campaign a result of "the darkness of reaction". But it is beyond any doubt that the campaign meant a personal help to many people.

